

(Lowell, *con't.*) Recently, the cafeteria was remodeled to be more appealing to students, with bright colors and lit awnings. Food is offered at stations, and students can select from a wide variety of options.

One standout program, however, is the milk pilot Lowell undertook in 2001, which has led to a district wide overhaul in the milk program. Project Bread funded Lowell to switch the milk containers in the middle schools from 8 oz. cartons to 10 oz. plastic bottles, which would be displayed in attractive retail style refrigerators. The goal was to increase milk consumption by making milk an attractive and appealing choice for middle school students.

The results of the pilot showed that more students drank milk with lunch and less milk was thrown away. Additionally, results showed more students actually participated in the school lunch program. The success of the pilot convinced Bob to continue using the larger bottles and new refrigerators, and to expand the program to the high school.

To cover the cost of the 10 oz. bottles, the price of lunch was increased from \$1.00 to \$1.50 (the larger bottles are included in free and reduced cost lunches). At the high school, more students voluntarily chose milk as their lunch beverage. Overall, changing the milk program has been quite successful in increasing milk consumption among middle and high school students in Lowell.

For more information about any of the schools mentioned, please contact Jhana O'Donnell at 781-338-6325 or jo'donnell@doe.mass.edu. Many thanks to Maria Davis, Ken Dube, Rich Medico, and Bob Deignan for their help with this article.

The School Foods Tool Kit-A Guide to Improving School Foods and Beverages is now available from the Center for Science in the Public Interest. A complete description of the guide, and ordering information can be found at www.cspinet.org/schoolfood/

USDA RELEASES FINAL RULE ON VERIFICATION REPORTING AND RECORD KEEPING FOR SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS

(Federal Register, September 11, 2003)
USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) posted a final rule in the Federal Register on September 11 that increases the reporting and record keeping requirements for school food authorities and State agencies that administer school meal programs, beginning in school year 2004-05. This rule requires school food authorities to report by March 1 the results of their verifications of student applications for free and reduced-price school meals. State agencies are required to analyze these data and target more rigorous oversight and technical assistance on school food authorities when their verifications result in high benefit termination rates, and to report these data to FNS by April 15. Contingent upon new funding, FNS will require additional data to be collected, beginning in school year 2005-06.

How Schools Can Win a Video Dance Party
YM will shake a groove with VERB's "Move It to Groove It!" Contest," getting tweens to dance, step, and find their own moves. Encourage tweens to enter the contest. Two lucky participants will win a video dance party for their entire school. Contest details and how-to dance moves are at <http://www.YM.com/pluggedin>. Entries must be postmarked by December 1, 2003



From the Editor

Recently, there has been a significant increase in media attention on the issue of childhood obesity. There have been reports that the fast food restaurants and corporations that make many of the “junk foods” kids like are pledging to make their products healthier. Articles across the U.S. report that many states are attempting legislation like banning soda sales in school as a means of addressing the obesity issue. There are even reports of lawsuits against large corporations. Many of these articles highlight the controversial nature of what would seem to be an uncontroversial issue, childhood nutrition. These reports leave us asking-exactly **WHO** is responsible for the foods kids eat?

Wherever you fall in the spectrum of opinion, no one would argue that the U.S. is facing a health crisis. In this issue, we highlight some of the initiatives addressing the obesity issue here in Massachusetts, both at the state level and local level.

InStep with School Health is produced with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under Cooperative Agreement # 03004

Massachusetts Targets Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Like most states across America, Massachusetts is facing some startling statistics about the health of its residents. Although Massachusetts has the 4th lowest level of overweight among all U.S. states, nearly 52% of residents are overweight and 17% are obese. Among youth aged 6-19, 10% are definitely overweight, while 17% are at-risk for becoming overweight.

The health implications of these statistics are serious and costly. Being even just 10% overweight can lead to health problems, and being significantly overweight or obese will in all likelihood lead to chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure. Aside from the human costs (lower quality of life, shortened life span), the monetary costs of what is now known as the obesity epidemic are enormous, with the average cost to taxpayers now reaching \$117 billion (to treat obesity related illness). Obesity also contributes to approximately 300,000 deaths annually, quickly reaching tobacco as the number one cause of chronic disease.

In response, the federal government is taking action to encourage increased physical activity and improved nutrition among U.S. residents through funded programs, mass media campaigns, and legislation. But many states, including Massachusetts, are taking their own steps to reduce the risk for overweight and obesity among their residents.

Since 2001, the Partnership for Healthy Weight at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has applied for and received funds from the Centers for Disease Control, and Prevention (CDC) to develop a state plan for the prevention of overweight and obesity in youth. MDPH has collaborated with other state agencies, organizations, and medical facilities to develop feasible and cost-effective action

steps to address obesity in youth. Targeted audiences for the Plan include state legislators, policy makers, school administrators, corporations, and organizations working towards reducing the risk of obesity. Now in final draft form, the Plan will be formally released in early 2004. Examples of recommendations included in the Plan are:

- Fund schools through mini-grants to implement innovative strategies to increase fruit and vegetable consumption
- Educate and mobilize key stakeholders in school communities to support quality daily physical education through conferences, trainings and media campaigns

Other initiatives are also taking place across Massachusetts to address youth overweight and obesity. The Massachusetts Department of Education (MDOE), in collaboration with MDPH, is the recipient of CDC funds to support efforts to improve nutrition and increase physical activity among youth in schools through the Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP). MDOE has hired a consultant to develop and provide workshops on quality physical education programs. The Nutrition Unit at MDOE provides training to schools on improving their nutrition environment.

Also, the city of Boston is the recent recipient of funds under the Department of Health and Humans Services Steps to a Healthier US program, which aims to help Americans live longer, better, and healthier lives by reducing the burden of diabetes, overweight, obesity and asthma. The program also addresses three related risk factors -physical inactivity, poor nutrition and tobacco use.

For more information about any of the programs listed here, contact Jhana O'Donnell at MDOE (781-338-6325, orjo'donnell@doe.mass.edu). Sources: MDPH website: www.state.ma.us/dph; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/mm.htm

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InStep with School Health

Starting with the next issue, ***InStep*** will only be available on our new listserv, the Mass CSHP Network. To subscribe, send your email address to: jo'donnell@doe.mass.edu. ***InStep*** will also be available on our newly updated website: www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/cshp.

Hard copies will be available by request only.

To send submissions, letters, and suggestions or to request a hard copy of ***InStep*** write to:

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Please share ***InStep*** with your Health and Physical Education, School Health Services, and Food Services staff!

How coordinated school health programming (CSHP) can work at your school: Incorporating nutrition programs and services into the CSHP

Safe and Healthful School

Environment: Provide healthy foods at mealtimes, including parties. Candy and other non-nutritional foods should not used for fundraisers or in vending machines.

Food and Nutrition services:

Lunches should match USDA requirements and offer healthy foods that taste good. Food service personnel should be educated in nutrition and sanitation.

Parent/Community Involvement:

Ask parents to provide healthy lunches and snacks and to attend workshops on nutrition.

Health Services: The school nurse or health center should have nutrition information available and have plans for students with special dietary needs.

In this example, ideas for addressing nutrition are applied to the CSHP model

Family and Consumer Sciences

Education: Teach students how to read and evaluate nutrition information labels.

Counseling, Psychological and

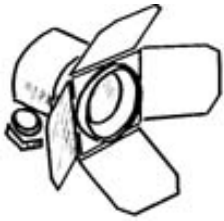
Social Services: Ensure that students with special dietary needs are not singled out. Be able to identify and refer students with eating disorders.

Health Education: Include nutrition education in any health education program.

Physical Education: Include nutrition in programs devoted to fitness and health. Promote nutrition as a means to better athletic performance.

Health Promotion for Staff:

Provide staff with access to nutritional foods and encourage them to set examples for students by choosing healthy foods.



Spotlight! Great food can be found in school cafeterias: Everett, Haverhill, Lowell, and Revere

In many Massachusetts schools the days of tasteless pizza, soggy string beans, and potato puffs are long gone. The four Massachusetts school districts highlighted here have food service programs that would rival any mall food court, with gourmet sandwiches, soups, salads and entrees that appeal to students and staff.

Everett High School

Nutritious food can be delicious and appealing to teens. At Everett High School, Food Service Director Maria Davis has developed a menu and dining experience that aptly competes with the food vendors parked in front of the school during lunch. The cafeteria is decorated with potted palms and lit awnings, and the food line is more reminiscent of an Italian bistro than a school cafeteria. Foods are displayed to look appealing and fresh, and salads and fruits are placed prominently to grab students’ attention. All breads and other baked goods are made fresh daily at the school.

Maria makes a concerted effort to offer foods that kids like, such as cheese sticks and subs, but she also takes care to make these foods as nutritious as possible. The cheese sticks are baked (in fact, no foods are fried), and students can opt for healthier grilled chicken subs or tomato/mozzarella sandwiches. The most popular items are, surprisingly, chef salads, turkey wraps, and grilled chicken caesar salads and wraps.

Maria relies heavily on government commodity foods, and finds a way to use almost everything that is offered. Garbanzo beans become part of a spicy vegetarian entrée. Pasta becomes a fresh salad with veggies and herbs. Ham and turkey logs are roasted with teriyaki sauce to achieve a smoked flavor. Apples and blueberries are baked into crisps, and strawberries are used for muffins and breads. Some unusual items offered at Everett include seafood salad sandwiches, chicken broccoli panini, and tomato bruschetta.

The cost to students for an entrée, fruit, vegetable and milk is only \$1.50.

Maria estimates they have an 85% participation rate, which is high for school lunch programs. Maria also supports the program by offering a la carte items such as home made cookies, and on Fridays sells whole loaves of fresh baked bread and pies to students and staff.

Revere and Haverhill High School

The food service programs at Revere and Haverhill High Schools are run by the same food service company under the direction of Ken Dube and Rich Medico, respectively. Both schools have similar cafeterias, designed to look more like a food court at a mall than a school cafeteria. Food lines are broken down into the *Fresh Grille*, serving hot sandwiches, including the very popular buffalo chicken sandwich; *Menutainment*, serving specialty items that vary each day; *Origins*, offering healthier options like salads and soups; and the *Trattoria*, serving pizza and calzones. Like Everett, Ken and Rich rely heavily on commodity foods to create their unique menu items.

Ken and Rich both try to offer nutritious foods that appeal to students, and always provide healthy options like all-you-can-eat salads and made to order chicken caesar salads. As well, their food service staff is encouraged to be creative and take pride in the food they serve. In Revere, staff often bring herbs from home, and in both schools staff dress in costumes for theme lunches like Chinese New Year and Cinco de Mayo.

According to Ken and Rich, students are viewed as customers, and they both include students in food planning through the YAC, or Youth Advisory Council. The YAC meets regularly to sample new foods, and provide feedback on the food service programs.

Although similar in design, each school has some unique characteristics in its food service program. In Revere, school staff can eat at the Revere Beach Retro Café, a nicely decorated room where staff can take a quick break and enjoy gourmet coffee, fresh made salads and soups, and sandwiches. Graduating seniors are treated to a “make-your own-sundae” party, and occasionally Ken sets up a Belgian waffle bar. A few unique items offered at Revere include BBQ pulled pork sandwiches, appetizer bowls with fried veggies, and fresh fruit salads.

In Haverhill, Rich Medico takes a few minutes every day before lunch to review the menu with staff and iron out any kinks, almost like a football huddle. Then the students arrive. So many students, in fact, that Rich has started offering more substantial foods in the snack line to accommodate students who may not make it through the regular lunch line in time to eat. Along with the usual chips and snack cakes, students can choose bagels, yogurt, fresh made mini muffins, hot pretzels, and fresh fruit cups. All of these foods are prominently displayed to catch students’ eyes, and the less nutritious snacks are strategically placed to be less visible.

At Haverhill, there also seems to be a beneficial side effect to having a great lunch program: less fighting. According to school staff, the students appear to be more engaged and focused on lunch, and the number of conflicts that arise during the lunch period seem to have decreased.

The cost in Revere and Haverhill for a complete lunch is \$2.00. Not bad for a fresh chicken caesar salad!

Lowell High School

At Lowell High School, more than 4,000 students could come through the cafeteria on any given day. Food Service Director Bob Deignan estimates that at least 50% are participating in the school lunch program. That’s 2,000 students daily, but the Lowell HS food service staff handles it with ease. (p.4)

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First CSHP Sponsored Workshop A Success!

This past August, MDOE and MDPH sponsored their first joint CSHP workshop, *Elementary Health Education 101: Including Health Education in Elementary Classroom Instruction*. The workshop, developed for elementary teachers with little or no background in teaching health, provided three days of instruction on program planning, content, and skill-based learning. Overall evaluations of the workshop were positive. The MA CSHP program is also sponsoring several other professional development opportunities during the ‘03-’04 school year. Be sure to check our website regularly for updates on professional development opportunities: (www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/cshp).

Healthy Snacks and Non-Food Treats for Kids

granola bars ♦ fruit chews ♦ fruit cheese ‘n’ cracker packs ♦ baked chips stickers ♦ veggies and low fat dip yogurt-covered pretzels and raisins ♦ crayons pencils ♦ erasers ♦ colored chalk ♦ whistles baseball cards ♦ balloons (ages 5 and up)

Free Activity Kit Available from CDC

As part of the VERB Extra Hour For Extra Action program (Oct. 27-Nov. 21, 2003), CDC has a free activity kit available for teachers and program leaders who work with youth. Each kit includes an activity guide with ideas for taking part in the program, colorful action cards to use with kids that encourage fun-filled activities, posters, a letter to parents, and a reward card for kids who take an "extra hour for extra action" each week and increase their amount of physical activity. To view and print the materials at no cost in electronic form, visit <http://www.verbparents.com/ehea.php>.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Allen Foundation Human Nutrition Grants

Allen Foundation grants are limited to projects that benefit programs for human nutrition in the areas of health, education, training, and research.

Deadline: Dec. 31, 2004.

www.allenfoundation.org

VERB Launches New Web Site for Tweens

: The new Web site for tweens (ages 10-13) features how-to demonstrations of activities by real athletes and the new VERB Recorder, a customizable online diary for keeping track of daily physical activities. Use the VERB Recorder with tweens in your programs, classes, and groups, and encourage them to regularly visit <http://www.VERBnow.com> for new activity ideas

Training Opportunity!

November 5, 2003

Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment

No Cost

Learn about current trends in nutrition and physical activity including healthy snacking, nutrition education materials, and proposed legislation on school nutrition guidelines in Massachusetts.

For more information or to register, contact Belinda Wilson at 781-338-6498, or bwilson@doe.mass.edu

Presented by the MDOE School Nutrition, Safety and Climate Unit, the New England Dairy & Food Council, Project Bread, and the John Stalker Institute of Food and Nutrition